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KENNER'S MISSION TO EUROPE

In an article, entitled "Breaking of the Light," published in Vol. XXI of the QUARTERLY, it is stated on page 217 that in the instructions given to Duncan F. Kenner, sent on a mission to Europe by President Davis towards the close of the Civil War, Great Britain and France were to be assured that the Confederate States would abolish slavery if their independence was recognized. The authority for this was said in a note at the foot of the page to be in "Kenner's own handwriting" preserved in his correspondence in the Library of Congress. Unfortunately the Library of Congress does not hold Kenner's correspondence, and the real authority instead of being a manuscript of Mr. Kenner rests upon a manuscript in the Library of Congress of William Wirt Henry reporting a conversation held with Mr. Kenner a few years before he died. This manuscript is now printed below, and according to Dr. Gaillard Hunt, chief of the Division of Manuscripts of the Library of Congress, "there was or is confirmation of it in the papers of Gen'l Brent, of Baltimore."

MEM: FOR I. M. CALLAHAN ESQ OF JOHNS HOPKINS UNI. SENT
24 MARCH, 1899, BY W. W. HENRY

A few years before the death of Mr. ——— Kenner of Louisiana, Dr. J. L. M. Curry and myself spent some time at the Greenbrier, White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia, with him, and he gave us a detailed account of his mission to England and France in the winter of 1864-5, as special envoy from President Jefferson Davis. Mr. ——— Kenner was a large slave owner, and a prominent member of the Confederate Congress; I believe the chairman of the Finance Committee. He said that on the fall of New Orleans, which he heard of on his way home from Richmond, he became convinced that the Southern Confederacy could not succeed if it held to slavery, as the prejudice of the civilized world was against it, and to succeed the South needed the countenance and support of England and France. I would say here that Mr. Kenner was then very wealthy and probably owned more slaves than any man in the Southern Confederacy. He said that on his return to Richmond to attend Congress, he informed Mr. Davis of his conclusion, and of his determination to move in Congress that a commission be sent to Europe to propose to the

courts of England and France that if they would acknowledge the Southern Confederacy it would abolish slavery. Mr. Davis did not approve of the proposal, and said that the affairs of the Confederacy were not so desperate as to warrant it, and he begged Mr. Kenner not to make the move at that time. Mr. Kenner did as Mr. Davis requested, but some time afterwards Mr. Davis sent for him and said that he was convinced that the proposed mission should be undertaken, and that he desired him to be the commissioner. Upon his consenting, Mr. Davis gave him in cipher his credentials and directions. Mr. Kenner then went to Wilmington, N. C. in order to run the blockade, but while he was waiting for a ship to go out, Fort Fisher fell in the middle of January, 1865, and he thereupon returned, by night, to Richmond, where he found provisions had gotten very scarce. He next determined to try to get to London, by way of New York, and under an assumed name he was put in charge of a man whose business it was to run the blockade across the Potomac, and bring back goods of various sorts. This man was not informed who Mr. Kenner was, but was made to believe that he was trying to get to Canada to help some confederates who had been arrested for attacking a ship in the lakes. Reaching the Potomac he found it so full of ice that it was dangerous to cross in a boat. He stayed for a few days at an old woman's house, who made him promise to bring her some needles and cloth when he returned. The boatman was slow to try the river, and Mr. Kenner was tempted to go higher up and trust himself to another, but was led to suspect his loyalty to the confederates, and contented himself to wait. The next night the boatman higher up was drowned in the attempt to cross the river. Having at last gotten across safely in the night he was conducted by his companion to a place near enough to Washington, to see the Capitol.

On getting near a dwelling his companion made him stop, while he went forward to learn the situation of the affairs at the house. He soon returned and said that it was all right, and that a young girl would meet him at the door, to whom he must deliver everything of value he had. With much hesitation he complied, and the next morning everything was returned to him. On leaving the house early in the morning he asked his companion.

whose guidance he was following, what that ceremony meant. He was told, that the place being so near Washington it was liable to be visited by the Federal Officials, who would search every stranger in the house, but would not search the person of the girl who lived there. Next night they were beyond Washington, attempting to get near a depot on the Baltimore & Ohio R. R. at which they could safely take a train. Approaching a house his companion again stopt him, while he went forward to see if the people who lived there were at home, as they were friendly to the Confederacy. He said the name of the family was Surratt.

On returning he said the family had moved away, and they had to spend the night in the woods. Next day they got on the train, and taking seats far apart were soon in Baltimore. Mr. Kenner drove at once to a clothing house and changed his suit for one which gave him the appearance of a Pennsylvania farmer. He then took leave of his companion, who wished him good luck in his Canada mission. Taking the train for New York he arrived very early in the morning and drove to the New York Hotel, whose proprietor he had frequently entertained at his Louisiana home. The clerk eyed him closely and then assigned him to a room in the upper story. Before going to his room he asked that the proprietor be sent to him. In his room a brawny Irishman commenced to make him a fire, and while kneeling at the fireplace the door opened and the proprietor stepped in. On recognizing Mr. Kenner he was greatly startled, but Mr. Kenner put his hand on his mouth and pointed to the Irishman. When the porter left the room the proprietor said "what in the world brought you to this house Mr. Kenner! Do you not know that if it is known that you are here it will cost the lives of both of us?" Mr. Kenner replied "No one knows the fact but you and myself, I have no idea of telling it, and if you do, the consequences will be on your own head." In reply to the question what he was doing in New York, Mr. Kenner told him he was on his way to London and that he had a commercial enterprise in view, which was true, but not the whole truth. He asked his friend to secure him a ticket on an outgoing steamer. A trunk was obtained that had just come off of a European voyage and was plastered full of foreign advertisements of hotels, and Mr. Kenner was placed in hiding outside

of the hotel until the steamer sailed. On the steamer Mr. Kenner had to run the gauntlet of the government officials, but he avoided suspicion by reading in a conspicuous place the New York Tribune and talking French to the foreigners on board. During the voyage he had to listen to much abuse of the Confederates from two or three of the passengers, which he bore in silence. On landing, however, he went to a restaurant where he found these men who commenced again their abuse, whereupon he walked up to them and said "I am a confederate and have had to listen to your abuse during the voyage over, but I want you to understand that if I hear another word of it I will cut your throats." It is needless to say that a profound silence prevailed until they parted.

Mr. Kenner found that Mr. Mason was in Paris. He thereupon went to Paris and sought an interview with him and Mr. Slidell. When they came together in a room he found Mr. W. W. Corcoran was present. He thereupon said "I was directed to show my instructions to Mr. Mason and Mr. Slidell and to no one else." But these gentlemen told him that he could safely proceed in the presence of Mr. Corcoran, as he was their confident adviser. He then had his instructions translated by the clerk of Mr. Slidell who had the key. The two Confederate Commissioners were greatly astonished, and Mr. Mason at first declared he would not obey instructions. But he yielded upon finding that if he did not, he would be suspended.

The French Emperor was communicated with through some one connected with Mr. Slidell, and he replied that he would recognize the Confederacy if England would do so, Mr. Kenner and Mr. Mason then returned to London, and the Prime Minister was indirectly sounded. He replied that under no circumstances would her Majesty's government recognize the Southern Confederacy. This of course put an end to all hope of Mr. Kenner's mission being successful, and in a few weeks he learned of General Lee's surrender. Mr. Kenner gave an interesting account of how he got back home and how he saved a portion of his property, but this need not be told.